

OUR UNFINISHED TASKS IN HEALTH

Speech  
by  
Senator Hubert H. Humphrey  
at  
Albert Lasker Awards Luncheon of  
American Public Health Association  
Tuesday, October 14  
New York City

Mrs. Lasker, Dr. Mattison, distinguished members of the health professions, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great privilege to speak here today at this luncheon honoring the medical scientists from here and abroad whose contributions to medical research have earned them the coveted Lasker Award Statuettes, symbolizing victory over death and disease. I salute these men in admiration and in gratitude.

The title of these awards in itself bespeaks a dedication to public service. No one has done more for public health in this country than the lady who sits beside us today or her late, great, and beloved husband, Albert Lasker. Acting together, they aroused our government to the public health responsibilities it must face in our era. And Mary Lasker has continued, year after year, to make the Administration and the Congress aware of the need for greater effort. I think I can say without the slightest exaggeration that the National Institutes of Health would not be one-tenth of what they are today if it had not been for the energetic and persistent work of Mary Lasker.

And I can assure you that Mrs. Lasker's foresight and creative citizenship has not been confined to the field of public health. I am now chairman of a Foreign Relations subcommittee on Disarmament. In this field, which involves the very issue of the continued existence of human life on this planet, I have found that some of the most challenging and important independent research is being done in a project which is the result of the foresight and courage of Mary Lasker.

But while this is a time for congratulation, it is also a time for rededication to the great tasks that lie ahead. One of our award winners today, my good friend Basil O'Connor, is not content to enjoy the satisfaction of a monumental task accomplished. Victory is now in sight over polio; so Basil is off on a new war of conquest against another group of diseases.



The shortage of doctors can be overcome only by a bold program of federal aid for medical education. About half of our Negro physicians are now trained in one school, Howard University, a federally supported institution in Washington to which I want to pay a special tribute today. Without in any way lessening the obligations of other schools to remove discriminatory barriers, we must plan a larger, even better equipped medical school at Howard University.

We must also begin to think of establishing new schools of public health not only at Howard, but elsewhere as well. Surely the shocking shortage of personnel in the local and state health departments demand immediate corrective measures.

Members of the American Public Health Association do not have to be reminded of the critical financial condition of this country's eleven schools of public health. Over the past six years, I have sponsored legislation to aid these schools through scholarships and construction grants. During the Congress just concluded, a bill was passed authorizing a million dollars a year for the next two years to help overcome the deficits of the schools of public health. However, the bill is very limited in scope, and the authorization was not implemented by an accompanying appropriation for the current fiscal year. The only real boost to public health these past several years has come through the efforts of Senator Lister Hill of Alabama, who has pushed through appropriations for public health traineeships at a level of about two million dollars a year.

## 2. Health Protection

The job in financing health protection has just begun. In a very fundamental sense, the findings of President Truman's Health Commission that millions of Americans lack adequate health insurance protection and that millions more who have insurance policies are not covered for any kind of preventive medical care still hold true today.

As a start, many of us have introduced bills to provide hospital and home nursing care for the millions of elderly people eligible to receive old age benefits under our social security system. A bill which I myself introduced in the last session of Congress is specifically designed to meet these objectives. This bill, however, is but one of several approaches to the problem of financing adequate medical attention for the elderly.

The forthcoming 86th Congress offers America a new opportunity to attempt to obtain a meeting of the minds on this problem. I would like to see the frankest exchange of views

between all of those groups, public and private, upon whose teamwork the successful solution of this problem depends.

Let us turn a new page. Let us leave behind us, if it is humanly possible, the bitter differences, the exchange of personal accusations, the epithets which have so often marred the debate on this subject of financing medical care.

Let us remember that what we are trying to do is to preserve the integrity of the individual. That means not only the individual elderly citizen who is entitled to his self respect. It also means the integrity of the great private medical profession of our land. It is essential that we continue the sound principle upon which our private medical system is built, and on which it has flourished. I refer, of course, to the right of individual choice of one's own physician.

Similarly, there must be respect for the integrity of the great private voluntary groups, private foundations, the health organizations and churches of this land, all of whom have made indispensable contributions to the well being not only of the old, but of the middle aged and of the youth of this nation.

I am confident that we can combine respect for our great voluntary institutions with respect for the welfare of our medically needy citizens.

It is, of course, shameful to relate that even before hospital care, many of our older citizens simply need more to eat. Pensions and old-age allowances are being constantly eroded by the tides of inflation. They are often shockingly less than sufficient to meet human needs. Many older people are forced by the inadequacy of pensions or old-age insurance to skimp on food.

Must we permit this misery to endure in a country whose farms yield such great bounty? Can we not think of ways in which to use our agricultural abundance for the benefit of these older people? We have our programs of sending so-called "surplus" foods overseas, and I am proud of the work I have done to get these programs under way. We have our school lunch program here at home, and we distribute food and dairy products through welfare departments to disaster areas and to chronically depressed communities. All of these programs have proved beneficial.

Why can we not carry this a step further and think about the possibility of a lunch

program for senior citizens, making surplus foods available to those thousands of churches, civic institutions and unions that offer facilities and programs for older people? Or better yet, a food stamp program, designed to supplement cash payments in the form of pensions or insurance.

Does this not sound like a logical step for the further development of the Agriculture Department's programs? I am going to ask my colleagues to give some thought to this idea when we meet again on January 7, and meanwhile I hope that the Departments of Agriculture and Health, Education and Welfare will also be thinking of ways to put these proposals into effect.

### 3. Medical Research

During the past two Congresses, under the leadership of Senator Lister Hill and the charming persistence of Mary Lasker, we have tripled the money available to the National Institutes of Health for its medical research programs.

But many "authorities" think and act timidly in this area too. When progress is made in increasing medical research budgets, such action is sometimes condemned as constituting "lavish spending", instead of being praised for what it is. It is ironic indeed to read occasional attacks against government and private medical research expenditures totalling only four-hundred million dollars a year -- less than one-tenth of one percent of the gross national product.

Even more revealing are the modest criticisms spelled out in the Bayne-Jones Report. That report recommends a combined medical research expenditure of approximately one billion dollars by 1970. But that estimate is low, since it is predicted on the assumption that we will continue to spend only four percent of our total research and development investment on ways of prolonging human life. If the more realistic figure of ten percent is used, we come out with an expenditure of about two and one-half billion for medical research by 1970. A large sum of money? It is actually only one-third of one percent of the six hundred and forty billion dollars projected as our gross national product in 1970.

In the field of cancer alone, how can we continue to afford an annual loss of 250,000 Americans a year, a large segment of whom are between the ages of 30 and 50. The survival of our democracy hinges in part, upon a greatly accelerated medical research offensive against cancer, heart disease, mental illness, arthritis, and the neurological diseases which kill



and cripple millions of Americans each and every year.

For that reason I am delighted that in past years a number of Lasker awards have recognized scientists from other countries who have made significant contributions in the common fight against mankind's most ancient and powerful adversary -- disease. This year you honor a German scientist, Dr. Gerhard Schramm, along with two American co-workers, for basic research leading to better knowledge of the nature of the human cell.

In another award, you honor Dr. Robert Wilkins of Boston for his brilliant investigations in the cause and treatment of hypertension. The award to Dr. Wilkins symbolizes to me the universality of medical research, since his work with Rauwolfia is the culmination of several centuries of investigation and use of this compound in India.

For world-wide cooperation in research and assistance is necessary if we are really to move forward in a meaningful way toward meeting the challenges now facing us. Indeed I am convinced that the new area for major contests between Communism and freedom lies in those parts of the world that have never till now known anything but poverty, ignorance, sickness, and death . . . As we try to help the ill-clad, ill-housed, ill-fed two-thirds of the world, let us remember that for many of them this is 1776, and our own anti-colonial revolutionary ideas are alive again and marching on. In many parts of the world people are accepting our slogans at face value -- they are understanding them in the context of their own misery. They are interpreting them in terms of their need for food, their need for education, and their need for relief from the dread suffering of disease. If we are to win the friendship and loyalty of these people, we must offer them assistance as well as inspiration -- assistance against the enemy they know in their everyday lives.

What I am recommending now is not simply a new emphasis in American foreign policy. I am recommending a whole new orientation.

I believe that most of the people of the world are getting bored with these endless mutual recriminations between East and West. This continuing exchange of insults is not statesmanship. Political blasts from Moscow, and counterblasts from the State Department are taking up an inordinate amount of time -- and they do not promote anything but further discord.

What we need is to reorient our foreign policy to get busy substituting solid works of peace for endless talk of war.

I know, of course, that America must maintain military strength while the world is troubled and divided as it now is. But I most earnestly believe that military strength alone can settle nothing. What we must do to achieve peace, I submit, is to recover and to make evident that generosity, humanitarianism and compassion that in the past won for us the world's admiration and respect and affection. The path to peace is better known to the doctors of the world than to the Pentagon.

What I think is most important today is that the world regain knowledge of the true spirit of this country. We now appear to the peoples of many lands as a frightening giant, unpredictable and unknowable. We brandish our hydrogen bombs and we panic even our friends. It is important, it is urgent, that the people of the world come to see us as a nation that cares, and cares deeply, about solid works of peace.

By solid works of peace, I mean health action for peace. I mean, as well, food for peace, schools for peace, and loans for peace.

Health for peace means a bold assault toward unlocking the mysteries of baffling diseases which afflict mankind. But it also means a vast expansion in applying known remedies against diseases on which we already have the answers.

Health for peace involves the voluntary mobilization of the resources of the Free World against disease. That mobilization involves the voluntary decision on the part of governments and private individuals -- including the private medical profession and the private pharmaceutical industry -- to intensify common efforts against disease.

As we work for peace, we create an atmosphere of peace. An atmosphere previously filled with invective will come to resound with the echoes of concrete accomplishments. Instead of widening the gulf between the United States and the U.S.S.R., we will help to narrow the gulf. Instead of the underdeveloped world drawing away from our war talk, it will become increasingly attracted to our peaceful actions.

Deeds of peace will reverberate around the world more effectively and with a warmer response than all the harsh words of criticism and insult.

The Atlantic community can and should become the spearhead, not simply of NATO military strength, but of health efforts for all of mankind. Fortunately some of this shift in policy has begun.

I am happy to report to you that the past Congress gave more impetus to international health work than any previous Congress. Let me cite just a few of its accomplishments:

1. The Mutual Security Act now proclaims it to be the policy of the United States to continue and strengthen mutual efforts among the nations for research against diseases in all parts of the world, noting that these diseases constitute "a major deterrent in the efforts of many people to develop their economic resources and productive capacities, and to improve their living conditions".

2. Another amendment to the Mutual Security Law authorizes the use of funds obtained from the sale of surplus foods abroad for the support of medical research in foreign countries. In a very dramatic sense, this amendment is a powerful lance tilted against the vicious and all too familiar cycle of poverty, disease, and death in the underprivileged world. It proclaims a new "cycle of life" in which the food from American farms is sent overseas and from the sale of those foods comes the money to support medical research and renew the cycle of a fuller and more productive life.

3. Under the terms of a resolution which I introduced and which the Senate unanimously approved earlier this year, the President of the United States is urged, through the medium of the World Health Organization and related groups, to invite the nations of the world to designate an International Health and Medical Research Year. The idea for such a year was originally proposed by Adlai E. Stevenson as "another way for the world to cooperate for survival instead of destruction". In January, 1959, a committee of the World Health Organization will be meeting to explore the expansion of international medical research, and I hope that the President will transmit this vital recommendation for an International Health and Medical Research year to it at that time.

4. On August 13, 1958, Senator Lister Hill introduced a bill proposing a new National Institute for International Medical Research as part of the existing National Institutes of Health. The bill authorizes an annual appropriation of \$50 million to encourage and support international medical research through grants in support of specific research projects in all parts of the world, the training of specialized research personnel through exchange fellowships and other means, support for the improvement of research facilities abroad, and facilitation of the rapid international exchange of medical research information concerning disease and disability.



The legislation proposed by Senator Hill has stimulated an enormous outpouring of professional editorial support. For example, at a luncheon honoring Surgeon General Burney of the United States Public Health Service for his contributions to international health, Dr. Gunnar Gundersen, the President of the American Medical Association, expressing confidence that most American doctors are deeply concerned with their international health responsibilities, remarked that "it is a shame and a crime for any one individual to hide a single medical discovery or procedure from the rest of the world!"

5. With the intention of studying and implementing the aforementioned proposals, the Senate Committee on Government Operations has authorized a study of all present programs in the field of international health and of ways in which these programs can be expanded. The Subcommittee which will conduct the investigation, of which I am chairman, completed during the last session of the Congress an exhaustive investigation of the administration and financing of our basic scientific research effort. We intend to pursue the study of international health with the same degree of thoroughness, including on-site inspections of medical research projects in various parts of the world which can be expanded through mutual effort.

I am pleased to note that the present Administration is moving forward in this area. It has already given a grant of \$300,000 to the World Health Organization to search out more effective ways of fostering medical research on an international basis. On September 18, in a speech before the General Assembly of the United Nations, Secretary Dulles pledged that the President would seek funds from the next Congress for international health programs. Following that statement there appeared in the press reports that Secretary Flemming had gathered together a group to work out a plan for an international health program which President Eisenhower would incorporate as his international health recommendations in a special health message to the incoming 86th Congress.

The Constitution of the World Health Organization states unequivocally that "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental human right". By that yardstick, the domestic and international proposals which I have described here this afternoon, are really bare minimums on the road to achievement of that goal. However, they offer an exciting challenge to the humanitarian impulses of the American people. I fervently hope that all of us here today will dedicate ourselves to their achievement.

We do move forward a little every year. That would be encouraging, if history were not moving so much faster. The sense of urgency which followed the first launching of Sputnik has drifted away, and far too many of our fellow citizens -- including some who have the highest responsibilities of government -- have relaxed into complacency.

I have been making speeches from one end of this country to the other for the past few weeks and I came here with measured confidence. The next Congress will be far better than the last. I have good reason to hope that we will be able to muster majorities for many items of legislation that have been long overdue.

But I must warn you of this -- our country will get progressive legislation only if you people who know and who care about these things actively demand it. I hope that you will make yourself heard in Washington loudly and often and that you will keep me and my colleagues informed of the country's public health needs. Only in this way can we take the steps that are so urgently needed if our country is to provide the necessities of a better life for all our citizens. You people have selected a career of dedicated service to the entire community. As you go about your tasks you learn many things, and you sense the urgency of many improvements. You must share your knowledge and sense of urgency with your representatives in Congress; you must educate us, and you must demand action when it is needed.

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